



# Paw Talk

A professional publication for the clients of East Valley Animal Clinic

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Erica O'Hern and our African Grey Parrot, Smokey

## Meet Erica!

East Valley Animal Clinic has the best staff! We also have a number of employees that have been with us for a long time. One of our valued employees is Erica, who has been with us since 2002. Erica came to East Valley Animal Clinic as a veterinary technician intern. She was sharp as a tack but pleasant and easy to work with, so we asked her to stay on after completing her internship

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## On Pins and Needles

Acupuncture is the insertion of needles into specific points on the body. The stimulation of the point has the ability to alter biochemical and physiological conditions that encourage the body to heal itself. Acupuncture has its roots in Asia where it has been used in the treatment of many diseases and conditions in humans for more than 4,000 years. There are records of acupuncture being used to treat elephants that date back more than 3,000 years!

In the Western world, veterinarians use acupuncture to bridge the gap between medicine and surgery, alongside traditional Western ideas. In small animal medicine, it is used most commonly for musculoskeletal issues (e.g. arthritis), nervous disorders, skin problems and internal medicine concerns such as heart and kidney disease. Acupuncture is often used when medications are not working or have too many side effects, or when surgery is not feasible.

Veterinarians can receive post-doctorate training and certification in acupuncture by the Chi Institute of Chinese Medicine, or TCVM. They teach a rigorous course, which combines lectures on the Traditional Chinese Medicine theory as well as hands on practical training. At the end of the program, which can take months to complete, a veterinarian sits for a certification exam.

East Valley Animal Clinic is proud to announce that Dr. Heidi Hammel has recently completed the TCVM course and is now certified in veterinary acupuncture. Dr. Hammel would be happy to consult with you to determine if your pet would benefit from acupuncture. Before you decide on any treatment approach, it is important to get a good diagnosis and then look at all the options, including acupuncture and those offered by conventional medicine.



Photo courtesy of the Chi Institute of Chinese Medicine – [www.tcvn.com](http://www.tcvn.com)

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# Scoot!

Has your dog or cat been scooting on the carpet? It could be an anal sac problem. Dogs, cats and most other carnivores have anal glands, which secrete a liquid that allows animals to identify one another with their "signature scent." This liquid is stored in two anal sacs, one on each side of the anus.

When a dog or cat defecates, the sphincter muscle presses the sacs against the feces and the sacs are emptied, or expressed. Dogs' and cats' feces are normally firm. If the stool is too soft, there may not be enough pressure to empty the sacs, causing a buildup of the fluid. This results in discomfort, and can lead to impaction, bacterial overgrowth, inflammation and infection. The symptoms of a problem include licking or biting at the anus, sitting uncomfortably and difficulty defecating. You may also notice a "fishy" odor.

Small dogs are more prone to anal sac problems than large ones. Obese dogs are also at a higher risk of developing a problem because of poor muscle tone.

Your veterinarian or groomer can express the sacs; however, you should not ask your groomer to express anal sacs regularly unless they are full. Dogs with anal sac problems may benefit from increased exercise and increased dietary fiber to create more bulk in the stool. For chronic cases, anal sacs may be surgically removed; however, complications from this surgery may occur so it's usually only recommended for severe cases.

Scooting may also be an indication of parasites, or that your pet has something stuck to the fur under its tail. Most pets never have a problem with their anal sacs, but if you notice these symptoms, don't let them persist; see your veterinarian before your pet's discomfort turns into a costly medical issue.

# Smarter Than We Realize?

Most dogs know the words "sit" and "stay," but a new study published in the journal *Behavioral Processes* suggests they could learn a lot more. A Border Collie named Chaser has been trained to understand the names of 1,022 objects.

John W. Pilley, a retired psychology professor at Wofford College, became intrigued by an earlier study that demonstrated a dog named Rico knew more than 200 words, so he purchased a Border Collie puppy and began his own experiment into how dogs comprehend language.

Over the course of three years, Chaser was trained to recognize the names of 1,022 different objects. The objects were toys acquired from second-hand shops that he named everything from "squirrel" to "Uncle Fuzz." Prof. Pilley believes she could still learn more.

Chaser also demonstrated she could distinguish nouns from behaviors. She was taught the commands "take," "nose" and "paw" (which meant to touch the object with her nose or paw), and asked to perform these behaviors in different combinations on a few of her toys. She could do it every time!

Next, Chaser was trained to recognize categories. Could she understand that a "football" and a "tennis ball" were both a "ball," which is different than a "Frisbee," but they were all "toys"? She could! This is something human children learn around the age of three.

Finally, Prof. Pilley wondered if Chaser could learn a new name by exclusion. He put a new toy amongst toys she knew well, and asked her to fetch it using a new name. This was a little harder for Chaser, but she could do it!

These fascinating studies could help scientists understand how children learn language, and help us all be aware that our dogs may be smarter than we realize.



Chaser with a few of her toys. Photo courtesy Chris Bott



**"The woman I live with had business cards printed for me. She says it's a nicer way to say hello to another dog."**

knew well, and asked her to fetch it using a new name. This was a little harder for Chaser, but she could do it!

# Toxoplasmosis

Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a parasite called *Toxoplasma gondii* (or *T. gondii*). It is a zoonotic parasite, meaning it can be passed from animals to humans, and has been found worldwide. During the reproductive stages, this parasite only exists in cats (both wild and domestic); however, other stages of development are found in all mammals and birds.

*T. gondii* is transmitted by consumption of oocysts (the reproductive form of the parasite) from cat feces in the environment, consumption of infected meat, and from transfer of the parasite from a mother to her fetus.

Healthy adult dogs and cats often show no signs of infection, but puppies and kittens may suffer from heart, liver, vision or neurological problems. Signs of infection may include diarrhea, cough, seizures and death, but are usually not sufficient alone for a diagnosis—laboratory tests must be done to confirm the infection. Immune-compromised animals, such as cats with feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV), are more susceptible to developing severe infections.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, *"Toxoplasmosis is considered to be a leading cause of death attributed to foodborne illness in the United States."*

The majority of people who become infected only suffer from mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. For newly pregnant women and individuals with a compromised immune system, toxoplasmosis can have severe consequences. Women who are infected just before becoming pregnant or during their pregnancy are at risk for miscarriage or delivering babies with birth defects.

You can reduce your risk of infection and that of your pets as well by keeping these simple tips in mind:

- Clean litterboxes daily. Toxoplasmosis takes more than one day to become infectious.
- If you are pregnant or immune-compromised, ask someone else to clean the litterbox. If this isn't possible, wear gloves, and wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after cleaning.
- Keep outdoor sandboxes covered when not in use.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after contact with soil, sand, unwashed fruits and vegetables, and raw meat.
- Do not eat undercooked meat (especially lamb, pork or venison), and wash all utensils and cutting boards that come in contact with raw meat.
- Do not feed raw meat to your cats.
- Keep your cats indoors to prevent them from hunting.

For more information on Toxoplasmosis, check out the following websites: Companion Animal Parasite Council ([www.capcvet.org/recommendations/toxoplasma.html](http://www.capcvet.org/recommendations/toxoplasma.html)) and the Centers for Disease Control ([www.cdc.gov/parasites/toxoplasmosis/](http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/toxoplasmosis/)).

**“No one appreciates the very special genius of your conversation as the dog does.”**

– Christopher Morley



# Microchips

The worst nightmare for most pet owners may be the thought of losing their beloved pet. Cats and dogs can slip through an open door and can quickly become lost or disoriented. Collars with tags can slip off or break. Tattoos can become unreadable over time. For a permanent form of identification, consider a microchip.

A microchip is a tiny electronic chip, about the size of a grain of rice, which is injected with a needle under your pet's skin between the shoulder blades. The process does not require anesthesia, and is no more painful than a vaccine. Once in place, the microchip is painless. The microchip contains a unique identification number which is read using a scanner that's passed over your pet's shoulders. The chip has no battery or power; the radio waves from the scanner activate the chip and the identification number is transmitted back to the scanner for display.

There are more than 50,000 scanners in the U.S.; virtually every veterinarian and shelter in the country is equipped with one, and one of the first things they do when an animal is brought in is scan for a microchip.

There are a number of different microchip manufacturers in the U.S., and each has a database that connects your pet's microchip number with your contact information. The American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) has created a Universal Pet Microchip Lookup Tool, a free, online service to determine which microchip registry is associated with each chip. As long as your contact information is current, it doesn't matter which brand of chip you purchased.

Accidents happen. A microchip can help turn your lost pet nightmare into a joyous reunion.



**MEET ERICA** *continued from pg. 1*

and passing her certification exam.

Erica currently works part-time, which allows her to stay home with her little boys, Collin, who is six-years-old, and Aidan, who is two-and-a-half. She likes the flexibility that working part time gives her. "I can be with my kids, and still keep current in my profession."

Erica has a special interest in exotic pets and birds. She is a wealth of information to all of us regarding birds, reptiles and fish. She shares her home with a number of species—Pico is a 16-year-old iguana, Homer is a 14-year-old Maximillian Pyonus parrot, Nikki is a 14 1/2-year-old Cocker Spaniel, and Simon and Henry are feral cats that she tamed as kittens six years ago. Erica and her husband, Kevin, have a very busy house!

In her free time, Erica enjoys the outdoors. Whether it is gardening, hiking, rollerblading or running,

Erica is always busy. Erica is a real asset to the clinic because of her years of experience and the gentle care she gives her patients.

# An ounce of prevention...

East Valley Animal Clinic is committed to the value of the physical exam. During a physical exam your pet is evaluated from head to tail. We look at the eyes, ears, teeth and throat. We feel the abdomen for abnormalities. We listen to the heart and lungs, evaluate the skin and haircoat, we even assess the neuromuscular system. To keep your pet at ease, the exam is done with as much gentle handling as possible. It may appear that we are just petting and talking to your pet, but be assured that a wealth of information is being gathered in these few minutes.

Sometimes, we only get the chance to examine your pet once a year. This is like a human getting an exam every five to seven years. Lots can change in that stretch of time! We are looking for early warning signs of a problem. Catching these problems early is always beneficial to both your pet and you. The annual exam is a great time to discuss issues specific to your pet such as diet, exercise and home dental care and other preventative issues.

Our goal at East Valley Animal Clinic is to work with you to keep your pet as healthy as possible for as long as possible.



Dr. Katie Dudley, assisted by Erin Skarhus, CVT, examines "Guinness"



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